COLLEGE ENTRANCE EXAMINATION BOARD
RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT REPORTS

RDR-69-70, No. 2

•

RESEARCH BULLETIN
RB-70-19, March 1970

Black Students at Predominantly White Colleges: A Research Description

•

John A. Centra

EDUCATIONAL TESTING SERVICE
PRINCETON, NEW JERSEY
BERKELEY, CALIFORNIA

BLACK STUDENTS AT PREDOMINANTLY WHITE COLLEGES: A RESEARCH DESCRIPTION[1]

John A. Centra

According to United States Bureau of the Census figures, the number of American Negroes attending college increased 85% between 1964 and 1968, compared to an enrollment increase of 46% for all students (Chronicle of Higher Education, October 13, 1969). Much of this long overdue increase has been at institutions which have traditionally enrolled a predominance of whites.

Increased desegregation has not been without accompanying problems. One of the most serious has been what Egerton (1969) terms the unpreparedness of colleges and universities. These institutions tend by their very nature to be slow to change, and Egerton concluded that few of those he studied have demonstrated "either the skill or the determination to educate students who differ markedly from the middle-class white students they are accustomed to having" (Egerton, p. 94). In light of this contention, one wonders what the black student experience at the predominantly white college has actually been. Black student reactions to the San Francisco States, Cornells, and Wesleyans have been widely publicized through the mass media, but much less is known about the recent college experiences of blacks at the majority of colleges. In particular little empirical information has been published.

What, for example, are the social and intellectual activities of black students at predominantly white colleges? How do their family backgrounds and economic circumstances differ from white students? What are their goals and aspirations? Do black and white students view the same college environment differently? These and related questions would appear to be particularly

self-report data. The latter includes family background information, student goals and future plans, and their involvement with various college activities. A more complete description of the questionnaire, its development, and its rationale has been published elsewhere (Centra, 1968).

It should be understood that the QSCC was designed to obtain general descriptions of colleges and their students. A study of racial group differences was not part of its original intention; consequently questions that might have been asked were not. However, students, and particularly black students, were probably less reluctant to respond to the questionnaire because of this more general purpose. The resulting sample is therefore probably fairly representative.

The QSCC Sample

Some 200 colleges had administered the QSCC in the fall of 1968. Eighty-three of these colleges were predominantly white institutions with at least one black student among the random sample of QSCC respondents. The remaining colleges were either predominantly black or, more often, had no black students among their respondents. The 83 institutions were located in 40 states and included nine public institutions. Most of the institutions, then, were privately controlled, with about half of them church-related.

The size of the sample of students completing the QSCC at the 83 institutions ranged from 74 to 413. Black students numbered from one up to twelve in each institutional sample, an average of three per institution.[2] The proportion of black students in the total sample approximated the proportion of black students at the colleges; the fact that most institutions

Results

Community and Family Background

Most black students in the sample (58%) have grown up in a city. Slightly over a third, in fact, came from cities of more than a half-million population. In comparison, 29% of the whites grew up in a city, with only 11% from a city of a half-million or more. Similarly, 44% of the black freshmen in the ACE survey have lived in a "large" city and another 27% in a "moderate size town or city."

There were also large differences in the socioeconomic backgrounds of black and white students in the QSCC sample. Forty-three percent of the fathers of black students were unskilled, semiskilled, or service workers (compared to 15% of the white fathers). Furthermore, the median family income was between $8,000 to $10,000 a year for blacks and between $10,000 to $14,000 for whites. Although lower than whites, the median income for black families from this QSCC sample was about $2,000 higher than for the parental families of blacks in the ACE survey and the University of Michigan study. Blacks in the QSCC sample, most of whom attended private colleges, were therefore better off financially than black college students generally. In spite of being in a slightly stronger financial position, black students in the QSCC sample still have had to find other ways to meet college expenses. That information is presented next.

Financial Support

In view of small parental incomes, it is not surprising that the majority of black students received little or no financial support from their parents. As indicated in Table 1, 27% received no parental support (vs. 13%

well into the black student's undergraduate years. Further studies must determine the extent to which these plans are carried out.

It would not make sense to dwell on what students planned to specialize in at the graduate level because of the small sample of students available at each specialization. A few comments, however, are warranted. The social sciences, in addition to being the most popular undergraduate major, were also the most frequently anticipated specialization at the graduate level: one out of five black students planned graduate study in the social sciences. Education ranked second as a graduate school choice (15%) for black students.

Involvement with College Activities

Are there notable differences between black and white students in the extent to which they are involved with various college activities? Certainly there have been differences in the high school activities of the two racial groups as reported by both the ACE and the University of Michigan surveys of entering freshmen. On this basis, then, one would expect that differences would also be found in college; the QSCC results substantiate this expectation.

Twenty-five activities were listed in the Questionnaire to which students indicated the extent of their personal involvement. The results appear in Table 2. Activities for which significant differences existed between the groups were as follows: white students were more involved than black students in organized politics, career-interest clubs, dating and social life, science activities, instrumental music, individual sports, and recreational-outing sports. Black students, on the other hand, were more involved than

whites in community service or social welfare programs, civil rights activities, and student activist organizations. There may, of course, be a good deal of overlap in all three of the latter activities; CORE, for example, was listed as a student activist organization in the Questionnaire.

Insert Table 2 about here

The differences in dating and social life activities were more pronounced for women. Although not indicated in Table 2, over twice as many white women as black women were deeply involved in dating and social life. Similarly, differences in participation in intercollegiate athletics increased when viewed separately for males: 36% of the black males were deeply involved in intercollegiate athletics compared to 28% of the white males.

Generally speaking then, white students have been more involved in organized college activities and, in particular, those activities which center on campus. Black students, on the other hand, have been generally more involved with activities directed at improving the greater society, and in particular, improving the position and condition of black Americans. Only the black athletes participated disproportionately (vs. white males) in campus-centered activities listed in the questionnaire. Since black students were employed in part-time work about two hours more per week than white students, it is also conceivable that they had less time free for social activities.

These results are somewhat comparable to the University of Michigan study. Hedegard and Brown (1969) questioned freshmen at the end of the year

about the activities in which they had engaged and found that black students were less active in broadly cultural, intellectual, and artistic enterprises either as spectators or performers. In addition, black women students at Michigan experienced more difficulties in dating than did male or female whites, or black males.

Perceptions of College

Theoretically, it would seem that a student's frame of reference influences what he perceives to be true about his college environment, and that this frame of reference is determined by a student's background and college experiences. In view of the dissimilarities in backgrounds and college experiences between black and white students, one would therefore expect the groups to perceive their college in differing ways. While analysis of the QSCC revealed a few differences in perceptions, there were far more similarities than expected.

The QSCC included 77 statements about the general college environment, statements that described conditions and emphases at the college. A typical item is: "There are many rules governing student behavior." Students responded on a four-point scale ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree, or definitely true to definitely not true. In this way students provided a general description of the environment at their college.

A factor analysis of the 77 statements based on student responses at 215 institutions has resulted in eight factors which differentiate colleges from each other.[3] The factors and a brief definition based on the items in each factor follows:

Restrictiveness--The extent to which rules and regulations govern student life; in loco parentis.

Faculty-student interaction--The extent to which students feel that the faculty are interested in teaching and in students as individuals.

Political activism--The degree of student concern for political, economic and social issues; students involve themselves in controversial issues.

Nonacademic emphasis--The extent to which fraternities and sororities dominate social life; also academic honesty among students is less prevalent, and students are more often expelled for disciplinary reasons.

Curriculum flexibility--The degree to which students have freedom in choosing courses and can experiment before selecting a major.

Unchallenging environment--A campus where students do not feel challenged in their course work and where they are more concerned about social life than about academic or intellectual matters.

Cultural environment--The degree to which students view the cultural program and facilities as excellent.

Laboratory facilities--The extent to which excellent laboratory facilities exist in the biological and physical sciences.

Seven of these eight factors were used to compare black-white perceptions of colleges. Laboratory facilities, the last factor, was excluded because of the small number of students in the sample majoring in the natural sciences (only students in the natural sciences responded to statements dealing with laboratory facilities). For each of the first seven factors a mean score for black and for white students was computed. These mean scores, as well as responses to certain individual perception statements, were compared to investigate possible systematic differences in the way each racial group perceived the college environment.

The mean scores, as well as standard deviations, are presented in Table 3. Inspection of the mean values indicates little difference between the two groups on the seven factors. Moreover, a multivariate analysis of variance, which provided a statistical test of differences between the two racial groups on all seven of the variables simultaneously, did not indicate

a statistically significant difference ($F = 1.65$, with 7, and 489 degrees of freedom). This means that black and white students in this study viewed the general features of their college environment similarly. In other words, neither racial group perceived any more or any less emphasis at their college in rules and regulations, political activism, or other features included in the seven dimensions.[4]

Insert Table 3 about here

There were, however, some specific items not included within the seven dimensions that indicated differences in what each racial group thought to be true of their college. In response to the statement: "Students associate with one another without regard to racial, ethnic, or social backgrounds," 39% of the black students did not think the statement was true of their institution, compared to 16% of the white students. In the view of many black students, therefore, race or other personal characteristics such as social background were indeed very important at college in determining who associated with whom. Fewer white students, on the other hand, shared the same view, perhaps because they were not as aware or sensitive to racial bias.

Another similar item with a somewhat different response by the two racial groups was: "There is great diversity in the racial and ethnic backgrounds of the students." Fifty-two percent of the white students agreed with this statement compared to 42% of the black students. Once again, it would seem that black students perceive the "racial environment" at college differently than do white students.

To briefly summarize this perception section, black and white students, in spite of having somewhat different college experiences, viewed the general characteristics of their college in the same way. With the exception of what might be referred to as the "racial environment," there was little difference in the way either racial group viewed the overall conditions and emphases at their college. Of course, it should be stressed that this analysis has investigated only average differences across many colleges. It may be that in some instances black students at an individual college will view their particular college environment quite differently from the way white students do. Due to the small sample of black students at any single college in this study, that question could not be pursued.

College Goals

In order to assess what each student saw as his purpose in attending college, the QSCC included eight goal statements. Students indicated which of the goals were most important, second most important, and least important to them. While the list is certainly not all inclusive, it does include the more prominent global goals with which students are purportedly concerned. A summary of the results appears in Table 4.

Insert Table 4 about here

There were no significant differences in the way the sample of black and white students rated the eight goals. The highest percentage of each group--41% of the black students and 47% of the white students--indicated that broadening their intellectual interests and acquiring an appreciation of ideas was most important to them. This same goal also had the largest

response differential between the two racial groups (6%), although even this was not statistically significant.

University of Michigan students, both black and white, also reported academic goals as primary; Identity, Vocational, and Social goals, on the other hand, were secondary goals (Hedegard & Brown, 1969).

For other goals listed in Table 4 responses were very similar, although black students indicated slightly more interest in developing their knowledge and skills in community and world problems. One might speculate that black students do indeed have some very different college goals, as exemplified by the current interest in black studies, for example, but that these were not included among the eight. Also, if a broader sample of white students had been used for comparison instead of only those from the same major fields of study, it is possible that differences between the racial groups would have been readily apparent. But for black and white students from essentially the same fields of study, and for only the more commonly accepted goals, the results indicate that the racial groups have very similar purposes in attending college.

In response to the question of how satisfied students were with the help the college had given them in progressing toward their goals, black students tended to be less satisfied. Specifically, 22% of the black students in the QSCC sample were dissatisfied, compared to 13% of the white students. Black students at the University of Michigan, after one year, were also less satisfied than their white classmates (Hedegard & Brown, 1969). It should be pointed out, however, that the vast majority of both black and white students in the QSCC sample were generally satisfied with their college. Because most were presently upperclassmen, it is of course possible that many of the dissatisfied students had already left their college.

Summary and Conclusion

What conclusions, if any, can be drawn about black students at predominantly white colleges? On the basis of the empirical evidence presented in this report, it would seem that they are both similar and different from their white counterparts. The similarities were many, perhaps more than would have been predicted. Black and white students were involved equally in over half of 25 college extracurricular activities; they rated eight possible goals in attending college similarly, with slightly fewer than half of both groups ranking the intellectual-academic goal first; and both groups perceived the general features of the college environment in the same way.

But some of the differences were also impressive and, in fact, point toward the existence of a dual environment. There were several on-campus activities in which black students, as compared to white students, were minimally involved. One might speculate that the black student, a relatively recent addition to most colleges, has found himself faced with an extracurricular program shaped by and for what has long been the dominant student culture. This dominant culture has been, in general, white and middle class. Given different interests and concerns, black students have spent their spare time in activities most meaningful to them, especially promoting civil rights or improving their situation on campus. Gaining "black recognition" on campus was in fact the leading protest issue during the first half of 1969, according to a study by the Urban Research Corporation (Chronicle of Higher Education, January 26, 1970). Black students were involved in more than half of the total 292 protests; included among their demands were the addition of courses in black studies, the recruiting

of more black students, and the hiring of more black faculty members and administrators.

Dating and social life, as the data in this report indicate, was a particular activity in which black students were only marginally involved. Since their interests or needs in this area would be no different than for white students, other reasons must account for their lack of involvement. Discrimination by fraternities, sororities or other social clubs may be one reason. Another is simply the small number of black students at so many predominantly white colleges. If there is an absence of interracial dating, this would undoubtedly limit a black student's social life. For black girls in particular, social life can be distressfully bleak. In a 1968 New York Times survey of seven northeastern campuses, one girl complained: "we can't ask a white boy for a date and you can be sure they don't ask us. With lots of the black boys dating white girls, we just sit around the dorms and get angry," (Lukas, 1968).

Further evidence for a dual environment comes from a closer inspection of the perceptual responses. While both racial groups viewed the general features of their colleges similarly, they viewed the so-called racial environment quite differently. Specifically, black students appeared to not only be very much aware of their minority status but to perceive their colleges as places where race or background determined friendships and associations. For black students in the previously mentioned New York Times survey, the college environment also seemed to be racially imbued. Indeed Lukas (1968) concluded from that survey that black student unrest "stemmed less from outright bigotry than from the 'feel' of an alien institution whose inhabitants often display quite unconscious insensitivity and ignorance."

Other differences between black and white students in this report were predictable; for example, black students came from lower socioeconomic backgrounds and consequently needed to rely on scholarship and part-time work as sources of college financial support. More unexpected, however, was the extremely high proportion of black students planning to attend graduate or professional school (82% vs. 74% of white students). It might be argued that the percentage is unrealistically high. Yet with the increasing emphasis on graduate education, these aspirations may be well-founded. Furthermore, according to a recent questionnaire survey of the 287 institutions belonging to the Council of Graduate Schools, much is now being done to facilitate the entrance and financing of "disadvantaged" students to many graduate schools (Parry, 1970). Whether enough is being done remains to be seen.

In closing, it seems necessary to reiterate that this report, by necessity, has focused on <u>average</u> similarities or differences between black and white students at a large number of colleges. At any one college, the differences could be much more extreme. The experience of Wesleyan University, a leader in recruiting black disadvantaged students, would seem to support this possibility. At that institution, several recent racial crises have resulted in what one observer describes as "two nations" in which "with rare exceptions white students and black students do not even talk to each other," (Margolis, 1970). Research evidence in this report would seem to suggest the existence of "two nations" in embryo at many predominantly white colleges. At the same time, based on the many similarities noted, it is not at all clear that a separate existence is inevitable.

References

Bayer, A. E., & Boruch, R. F. The black student in American colleges. American Council on Education Research Report, 1969, 4, no. 2.

Bereiter, C., & Freedman, M. B. Fields of study and people in them. In N. Sanford (Ed.), The American college: A psychological and social interpretation of the higher learning. New York: Wiley, 1962. Pp. 563-596.

Centra, J. A. Major field as a variable in student perceptions of a large, complex university. Paper read at the 50th Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association, 1966.

Centra, J. A. Development of the questionnaire on student and college characteristics. Research Memorandum 68-11. Princeton, N. J.: Educational Testing Service, 1968.

Clark, K. B., & Plotkin, L. The Negro student at integrated colleges. New York: National Scholarship Service and Fund for Negro Students, 1963.

Egerton, J. State universities and black Americans. Atlanta, Ga.: Southern Education Foundation, 1969.

Hedegard, J. M., & Brown, D. R. Encounters of some Negro and white freshmen with a public multiversity. Journal of Social Issues, 1969, XXV, No. 3.

Lukas, J. A. The Negro at an integrated college: Now he's proud of his color. The New York Times, June 3, 1968.

Margolis, R. T. The two nations at Wesleyan University. The New York Times Magazine, January 18, 1970.

Newcomb, T. M., & Feldman, K. A. The impacts of colleges on students. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1969.

Pace, C. R. Comparisons of CUES results from different groups of reporters. College Entrance Examination Board Report No. 1, 1966.

Parry, M. E. A survey of programs for disadvantaged students. Progress Report 70-1. Princeton, N. J.: Educational Testing Service, February 1970.

The Chronicle of Higher Education. "Negro enrollment up 85 pct. in 4 years." October 13, 1969.

The Chronicle of Higher Education. "Most protests not violent, survey shows." January 26, 1970.

Footnotes

[1]This study was supported by the College Entrance Examination Bc rd.

[2]Race was determined by the student's reply to the question "What is your race?" Four alternatives were offered: Caucasian (white), Negro, Oriental, and Other. Only the first two alternatives determined the groups studied. The questionnaire did not ask for individual identification.

[3]For this analysis the institution was used as the unit of measurement, meaning that the average scores for students at each college were factor analyzed. A principal axis solution with an Equamax rotation was used.

[4]A second multivariate analysis in which each of the two racial groups were divided into male and female segments (for a total of four groups) indicated a significant overall difference on the seven perception factors ($F = 4.78$, with 21 and 1399 d.f.). This difference was attributed to the sex factor rather than the race factor. In short, men and women differed in their perceptions of the general environment (largely the social-cultural dimensions) but once again black and white students did not.

Table 1

Percentage of College Expenses Received from Parents and from Scholarships

Expense Percentage	Parents		Scholarship	
	Blacks	Whites	Blacks	Whites
None	27%	13%	32%	62%
1 to 25	24	16	21	19
26 to 50	15	10	17	10
51 to 75	13	18	11	3
76 to 100	19	43	16	4

Table 2

Involvement with Various Activities at
Predominantly White Colleges,
Percentage Deeply and Moderately Involved[a]

	Black Students		White Students	
	Deeply Involved	Moderately Involved	Deeply Involved	Moderately Involved
Religious (organized)	10.8	35.3	10.4	33.3
Campus publications	3.6	18.1	6.4	18.1
Community service or social welfare[b]	18.5	32.1	10.0	35.7
Civil rights[b]	25.3	29.3	1.6	12.4
Fraternity, sorority	14.9	9.2	18.1	9.2
Political (organized)[b]	3.2	15.3	6.0	20.9
Student Activist Organizations[b]	7.6	11.2	.4	4.8
Internationals problems, peace movement	4.4	14.1	1.6	17.7
Career interest clubs[b]	10.4	30.1	13.7	37.8
School spirit (pep rallies)	17.7	37.3	16.9	43.8
Student government, campus issues	13.7	38.2	10.0	43.4
Dating and social life[b]	23.7	48.6	36.5	46.2
Art	6.8	25.7	5.6	28.9
Science[b]	5.6	20.1	6.8	27.3
Instrumental Music[b]	9.6	27.7	8.8	38.2
Vocal Music	14.1	17.3	11.2	18.9
Drama	8.8	21.7	6.8	32.5
Poetry	5.2	13.3	2.8	12.4
Speech and debate	3.2	15.7	2.8	12.9
Foreign or art films	5.2	20.9	5.6	27.7
Folk, ballet, modern dance	7.6	17.7	3.6	20.9
Intercollegiate athletics	16.5	16.5	13.7	20.1
Intramural athletics	18.1	22.9	17.3	26.9
Individual sports[b]	9.2	28.1	15.3	30.9
Recreational-outing sports[b]	7.6	30 9	20.9	28.5

[a]Those not involved with the activity indicated so by one of three responses: "not involved," "no opportunity to participate," or "the activity does not exist at this institution."

[b]Percentage difference is statistically significant at the .05 level.

Table 3

Means and Standard Deviations of Black and White Student Sample on the Seven College Environmental Factors[a]

Factor	Black Students (N = 249)		White Students (N = 249)	
	Mean	Standard Deviation	Mean	Standard Deviation
Restrictiveness (9 items)	22.2	5.2	22.3	5.4
Faculty-Stud. interaction (6 items)	17.1	3.3	17.7	3.2
Political Activism (7 items)	14.9	3.9	15.4	3.6
Non-academic (6 items)	13.5	3.8	13.1	3.7
Curriculum flexibility (5 items)	12.5	2.8	12.9	3.0
Unchallenging (7 items)	16.8	3.5	16.7	3.3
Cultural Environment (4 items)	11.6	2.6	11.9	2.7

[a]The overall F ratio from multivariate analysis of variance was 1.65; with 7 and 489 degrees of freedom it is not significant, $p = .05$.

Table 4

College Goals of Black and White Students

Percentage Reporting Each Goal as Most Important, Second Most Important, and Least Important[a]

(N = 249 Black Students and 249 White Students)

	Most Important		Second Most Important		Least Important	
	Black Stds.	White Stds.	Black Stds.	White Stds.	Black Stds.	White Stds.
Broaden my intellectual interests and acquire an appreciation of ideas	41	47	19	18	1	1
Increase my appreciation of art, music, and literature	2	1	3	3	17	17
Decide upon occupation or career and develop necessary skills	25	26	18	18	9	9
Increase my effectiveness in working and getting along with different kinds of people	15	14	25	29	2	2
Develop my knowledge and skills in community and world problems	4	2	9	6	3	2
Help clarify my moral and ethical values	1	1	3	2	25	24
Acquire knowledge and values basic to marriage and a satisfying family life	2	1	6	6	31	32
Acquire background for further study in some professional or scholarly field	10	8	17	17	8	10

[a]None of the percentage differences are statistically significant at the .05 level.